

'THE TIMES OF HOPE AND DESPAIR': GENDER AT THE CROSSROADS OF WATER AND SANITATION IN BANGLADESH

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1. Introduction

Since our childhood, the fairy tales of different cultures such as Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty (English), *Vacilisa* (Russian) and *Rajkonna Kongkaboti* (Bengali) have been enchanting our minds towards the 'romantic' notion that a brave, dynamic, strong prince will come and rescue the princess from worldly distress so that they can live 'happily ever after'. These fairy tales depict a 'dream world' where suffering, pain, vulnerabilities and violence are non-existent. This *Cinderella symptom* has indeed deeply influenced the social attitudes and the behaviour of men and women in any given society. Recently the Oscar winner movie 'Slum Dog Millionaire' depicted the miserable face of poverty as well as the 'heroic' role of a poor boy living in a Mumbai slum. The real stories of the 'prince and princess' are far different from those depicted in fairy tales or in the movies. I quote here the voice of a 10 year old girl living in a slum in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Poverty has taken away her childhood but not her dreams. Young Farida, tiny and malnourished, carries six pitchers of water every day which often leaves her shaking from exhaustion. Farida shared how painful it was for her to walk each day and collect the water:

“My body aches, my waist and my legs ache so much. I end up getting an ache in my waist whilst walking all the way. This job is painful. My mother also carries water. Some other girls do similar work. They bring the water in the morning and then leave for school and fetch water again after school”. She mentioned that some houses do not fetch water. “If the woman of the Household is ill or elderly then they buy one pitcher of water for five taka.’ Sometimes my mother does this, but I do not let her do it. Her hand is broken so I do not let her collect the water. If she gets hurt and dies then who would take care of us? We bring six pitchers daily. We have to cook in the morning and in the evening, so we need more water. My father pulls a rickshaw. My mother works in the community centre where marriages take place. She comes at night. I carry lunch for my sister at Pallabi (nearly two miles away from the slum) as she works in a garment factory. I bring water from above and it is a hard job. It is very far. After returning, I bathe my younger brother and sister; feed them, put them to bed and then I go out to collect sticks for the fire. Then I take a bath and leave for school. I wish we had a better water and sanitation system. The bathroom is dirty and I cannot go in it. Nobody cleans it. People cannot pay the expense of the cleaner. How would they pay when there is no work? There is a problem with water in the pond. There are many people who go to the pond to bathe and end up urinating in the pond. I hate this. The sewage pipeline from the toilet also ends in the pond. This causes diseases. Many face diarrhoea and as a result lots of money is wasted. We face more problems in the rainy seasons. We live in this wrecked house and when it rains we fall into trouble. In this situation we sit here and cry. What else can we do when we are poor? We live in this slum because of the fact that we are poor. I want to do a decent job. I want to go to a nice school and also want to be a doctor. I just want to take good care of my parents. I am willing to do any job”. (Mannan, 2003).

Rapid urbanisation in Bangladesh has primarily been a function of rural to urban migration. There is a strong link between urban poverty and the feminisation of the poverty of women who have left villages with the hope of a better future. However, the garment industry promoted by the globalisation principles of a free market economy has been instrumental in the in-migration to Dhaka. They are living a miserable life in the cities without basic services and amenities. Although they have been contributing to the national income, where 90% of the workers in garment factories are female, the majority of whom, live in the slums. Squatter settlements and slums do not have legal tenure or occupancy and are thus not officially recognised and served by Government authorities. Insecure legal tenure makes slum dwellers vulnerable to eviction and thus results in both NGOs and poor residents being reluctant to invest in micro-credit schemes, building of schools and establishment of water points and latrines. As such, only a small number of NGOs work in urban areas with the majority of development work and interventions being concentrated on rural areas (Feroz Ahmed, 2004).²

Poverty experiences are more or less the same irrespective of the geographical locations, but are very different in terms of gender. Gender and the environment (encompassing water and sanitation) is one of goals in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for eradicating poverty. The two issues are interconnected as water is essential for the well-being of humans, crucial for economic development and a primary prerequisite for the health of ecosystems. Safe water for domestic purposes is a necessity for human health and survival and along with improved sanitation and hygiene will decrease morbidity and mortality especially among women and children. Water is an entry point for sustainable development, poverty eradication, human rights, reproductive and maternal health, combating HIV and AIDS, energy production, improved education for girls and a reduction in morbidity and mortality. But yet there are still 1.1 billion people without access to safe drinking water and 2.6 billion without access to adequate sanitation (Internet: Gender and Water Alliance, 2010). This situation has an enormously negative impact on women and children worldwide, including those in Bangladesh

With this background, this paper will be focussed more on urban than rural based issues in relation to gender, water and sanitation. Insights will be drawn largely from my long term involvement in research titled 'Livelihood Gender- Sanitation relating to Urban Poor'. The paper will also consider the links between gender related policy approaches in general (WID, GAD) and water and sanitation in particular, to locate the critical concerns and issues in Bangladesh.

1.1 Is gender a development issue?

It has been accepted that without the development of women, who constitute almost half of the world's population, real development cannot be achieved. International recognition of the critical and complex socio-economic and political conditions faced by women are reflected in world conferences of the United Nations held in Mexico in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, Beijing in 1995 and Beijing +15 New York in 2009. Many international agencies, including the UN, along with national governments have given gender issues a higher profile when addressing development challenges, particularly in developing countries. Renowned universities all over the world are offering gender courses and organising conferences, seminars and workshops about these issues. Academics, feminist writers and activists are continuously working on gender issues in many parts of the world.

The concept of gender is perhaps the single most important factor in shaping who we become. Feminists argue that culture and religion portray an expectation of the ideal role of a 'good woman' as the dedicated mother, wife, sister and daughter in society. These patriarchal systems shape the minds of society. This social construction of male and female relationships denotes gender stratification, that is it refers to an unequal distribution of socially valued resources and rewards between men and women e.g. women are only seen as docile, wives and mothers involved in cooking, cleaning, washing, caring and nurturing the family within the private sphere, whereas in public sphere, men are strong, virile, the breadwinner, head of the family and the decision maker. Thus, from the time when we are born until we die, gender socialisation is a constant part of our lives.

Gender refers to the social relationships of a given society that are constructed by man or manmade patriarchal systems. Connell has argued, that the concept of hegemonic masculinity reflects the power dimensions of gender relations (Cleaver, 2002; Connell, 1987). This concept introduced some fluidity, in the sense that masculine and feminine characteristics may change over time, and thus the ruling group of men may be replaced by another group of men (Bhasin, 2004; Chowdhury, 2008). However, gender roles are a dynamic concept that is flexible, shifting and constantly changing over time and in terms of context. Gender is thus an analytical tool used to understand the status of men and women in a given society.

The water and sanitation sectors have also been emphasising gender equality and demanding greater participation of women in social, political and decision making process, actions which have resulted in an empowerment process for women. 'Water is also vital for other facets of sustainable development such as environmental protection, food security, empowerment of women, education of girls and reduction in productivity loss due to illnesses. Water is a catalytic entry point for developing countries in the fight against poverty and hunger, and for safeguarding human health, reducing child mortality and promoting gender equality and protection of natural resource' (UN Millennium Task Force on Water and Sanitation, 2005). But we still experienced that despite the various policies and measures adopted by international agencies and national governments, women are the poorest of the poor, particularly in developing countries. The question to be asked is whether women access and participate in the development process? How effective has the water and sanitation sector been in promoting women's advancement and gender equality? What have been the achievements so far?

I have found no simple answers to these questions. As mentioned earlier, gender is a complex issue and it must be dealt with from a holistic perspective. I would now like to discuss some of the current issues and debates in Bangladesh around gender and development in general but in particular relation to water and sanitation. There have been some significant policy level achievements in this sector, but huge frustrations remain in the attempts to translate these policies into practice. I will not critically analyse the water and sanitation sector, but rather I am seeking to look at the nexus between gender approaches in water and sanitation among urban poor, who are identified as a critically vulnerable section in society.

2. Gender and development, water and sanitation: Hopes and despairs

The last few decades have witnessed a great deal of discussion on the development of women and

gender, particularly in developing countries. Mainstreaming Gender³ has been since the 1990s a key concept discussed in literature in the fields of gender and development. The ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality. This concept successfully leads to a gendered perspective in the national systems of developing countries, including Bangladesh.

Correspondingly, mainstreaming gender in water and sanitation would re-address the gender inequalities in this sector that currently hinder development. Increasing international awareness about the importance of gender in sanitation and water to date has had little impact on planning, policy and management (Plowman, 2000; Mannan, 2010). Nonetheless, in recent development processes in Bangladesh and particularly in the sector of water and sanitation, gender is being referred to as a 'cross-cutting' issue that is often lost in the mainstream approaches (Mannan, 2010; Joshi, 2003). For many agencies working in the WATSAN sector, 'Gender still means women (and children)' and the manner in which gender is addressed, translates at best to involving women in the projects (as in the WID approaches from 1970s), with the emphasis still being on making the project successful, i.e. completing within the given time frame and with low costs (Wallace and Wilson, 2005; Cleaver, 1998).

Again, effective analysis suggests that 'gender approaches to water and sanitation have largely concentrated on increasing the numbers of women represented in the organisations. This approach is justified by the argument that involvement in decision making and management will ensure that resource management takes the priorities of women more accurately into account, resulting in the more efficient empowerment of those who take part (Cleave, 1997; Narayan, 1995; UNDP, 1990; UNCED, 1992; SDC, 1994; DANIDA, 1992). In Bangladesh, this sector primarily focuses on the Practical Gender Needs (PGN) as directed by the WID approach and yet lacks the implementation of Strategic Gender Interest (SGI) from the perspective of the GAD approach, which hinders the empowerment process of women which discussed below.

2.1 Lack of conceptual clarification

I have come across different interpretations and understandings of gender among and within organisations (Mannan, 2010). Either they treat it as 'special', as a separate issue or there is a general understanding that it is not a responsibility of all, but the sole responsibility of the gender focal point or if there is one, the gender unit. The perception of gender varies from person to person, between males and females and even within females as identified by a senior female staff member of a national NGO in Bangladesh, "I got the impression that gender as a concept is not understood by the majority and that the entire burden of gender lay on the shoulders of me alone. Even some of my male colleagues complained that 'everywhere women are receiving priority and please stop this as you are raising problems by giving them priority'". This person was the only person responsible for looking after 'gender' concerns or issues within this organisation (Mannan, 2010).

In Bangladesh, while water and sanitation for the poor remains a 'poorly researched issue', gender issues are an even more neglected concept, highlighted only by the occasional passing reference to women's roles as family caretakers or their needs for privacy during defecation. The Bangladesh Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) fails to include an understanding of the local poverty and gender inequities that affect sanitation and water and its uptake. This is ironic in light of the huge volumes of

poverty research in Bangladesh (Joshi, et al., 2005). None of the agencies (NNGO, INGO or even donors) do not have conceptual clarity and well defined policy framework in relation to gender in the water and sanitation sector.

In Bangladesh, the widespread use of the term gender has been largely influenced by donors. Each project in each sector then develops their own gender policy according to the donor's requirements. These have not been consolidated by the respective ministries or departments (or even donors). There is such resistance to follow the gender policy of a project that even committed staff members cannot make progress beyond their own immediate scope. Gender policies themselves tend to only cover the difference between men and women. However, the lives of men and women from each different socio-economic group are very different. As a result, most urban policy documents categorically mention women and/or gender with little differentiation made between the two terms. Subsequently, the process of implementation has been hampered due to the lack of a proper understanding of the issue.

2.2 Policy intervention and gender

The Constitution of Bangladesh ensures equal rights and equal opportunities to all citizens, irrespective of sex (Articles 19 and 20) and the participation of women in all spheres of national life (Article 10). This is further incorporated into the principles of City Corporation 'municipal ordinances - intent' to provide basic services to all. Articles 17, 18 and 19 of the Bangladesh Constitution refer to the provision of educational, nutritional, health and other socio-economic services and opportunities (MOL, JPA, GOB, 2000) and the 1997 Pourashava Ordinance outlines the provision of water supply, sanitation, drainage, refuse disposal as compulsory functions of these local bodies (MOL, JPA, GOB, 1998). The National Housing Policy (1993, 1994, 2004) makes specific recommendations (in Article 5.10.2 of NHP, 2004) to provide 'slums and settlements with hard core poor' populations with water supply, sanitation and other basic facilities. The policy goes as far as recommending (in Article 5.10.5) the extension of water and sanitation services to permanent dwellers and other non-slum poor (GOB, NHP, 2004). It is the only urban development policy in Bangladesh with little influence from international donor and financial institutions because Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authorities (DWASA)⁴ in collaboration with national and international NGOs have been undertaking the activities of providing safe water and sanitation in the slums and to low income communities (Source: an official document of DWASA).

All policies and strategic level planning, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)⁵ also provide strong emphasis on water, sanitation and gender in Bangladesh. Since the 1980s, many initiatives in the sanitation sector have singled out women for special attention. In 2003 an international conference on sanitation 'SACOSAN' was held in Dhaka with a declaration of sanitation for all by the year of 2015 with the support of the Government, NGOs and donor collaboration.

Despite the vast numbers of poverty studies and analyses, policy formulation in Bangladesh remains an elitist exercise. An example of this is Bangladesh's PRSP, finalised in December 2004. There is local criticism that 'the policies proposed in the draft PRSP are pro-poor but do not offer tangible initiatives to bring about real improvements in the lives of people living in poverty' (Ahmed, et al., 2004). The PRSP is claimed by its formulators to be a product of participatory consultations, but provides no evidence of

consultation with urban poor or with women (Joshi, et al., 2005). There is a notable silence in Bangladesh, as well as in international policy statements on the sanitation needs of children, the elderly and the disabled and finally on why and how women remain responsible for water and sanitation tasks at home (Joshi, et al., 2005). There is a National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (1998) and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs is responsible for overseeing its implementation. Instead, it is largely ignored, partly because it is too long, too complicated and too confusing (Joshi, et al., 2005). However, respect for the rights of the poor to demand a space and voice in urban planning is not encouraged by the government and is rarely challenged or supported, even by progressive donors (Joshi, 2005; Mannan, 2010). During a personal meeting with a senior urban development staff-member of a donor, it was stated that the donor's focus was not on urban poverty, as this would oppose the government initiatives to control in-migration (Mannan, 2010).

2.3 Gender blindness within organisations: an effective agent for change?

The first feminist critics of organisational theory developed in the mid-1970s, as a result of organisations not being gender-neutral (Plowman, 2000). From feminist perspectives, it is well understood that women have not equally benefited with men from development, a statement which includes the sanitation and water sector (Zwarteveen, 1994; Goetz, 1997). However in Bangladesh, there is inadequate knowledge and documentation about the understanding of gender, water and sanitation in general and in reference to the role of organisations in particular. In the sanitation sector in Bangladesh, gender is neither adequately visible at the grass root levels nor within organisational culture. Development agencies (NGOs, Donors) have sound gender policies, but it has been observed that the mind-set at a management level is very important. For example, a sector programme coordinator of a donor agency who has been in Bangladesh for eight years admitted that he was not totally familiar with the urban sector in general and gender in particular, but argued that over the past five to six years, that gender had been an integral part of his work! (Mannan, 2010)

The extent to which women in a given organisation can exercise power is dependent on whether the concept of gender analysis has been introduced into the organisation itself. National cultural values are reflected in the ways in which an organisation functions. These values stereotype the appropriate roles and behaviours in a manner that generally limits the access of women to resources and decision-making (Wallace, 1998). A senior level manager (female) in an INGO shared her views about gender, 'I observed that a trend in this office among male colleagues, even at the higher executive level, is to have a friendly attitude and cooperate with female staff members only at lower levels but not with female staff members holding an equal or higher position' (Mannan, 2010).

The effectiveness of the existing 'women's machinery' of the government, which has been in place for a long period of time, has never been properly analysed. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWCA) was established in 1984 and later, WID and sub-WID focal points were introduced to each ministry. However, organisational attitude towards gender relations reflect not only in the external programs of the organisation but also in the internal organisational culture. As Plowman critically argued, "it is always much easier to raise questions of gender differences in an organization's programs 'out there' in the field, than it is to get your own house in order first" (Plowman, 2000, p193). Hence gender is not only lonely on the agenda, but also receiving 'subaltern' attitudes from the policy through

the organisational level in relation to water and sanitation. In the decision making process there are quite a few professionals and academics from the water field working in the sectors where I identified serious gender gaps.

2.4 Gender and governance: a power relation

In a gender sensitive system of governance, the required machinery is created to facilitate the process of gender mainstreaming in all sectors, including water and sanitation, so that both men and women are given the opportunity to participate equitably in the development process. Women's participation is marginalised even further at local government institutions, reflecting the social realities of the subordinate and dependent status of women and the consequent invisibility of them in the public sphere in Bangladesh. In order to secure a minimum representation of women at the various levels of local government bodies, the system of nomination was introduced by ordinances promulgated and/or laws framed by the Parliament. Women's access to the political arena is one of the most significant areas in the empowerment process of women. Women are still in the secondary position and cannot influence the decision-making process in the family, community or at the national level. Women's participation in politics is a precondition for democracy and the state is compelled by the principles of equality to ensure steps are taken to achieve this. In addition, one of the primary reasons why successive plans have failed to be achieved and policies have failed to be implemented in Bangladesh is the partisan attitude of the alternating governments⁶ (Joshi, 2005; Mannan, 2010).

2.5 Urbanisation and gender: limited access to basic services

Over the recent years Bangladesh has experienced rapid and unplanned urbanisation; the capital city of Dhaka has already a population of over eight million. The inadequacy of urban utilities and overcrowding are reflected in the high levels of urban deprivation in Dhaka, characterised by poor levels of public health, education, shelter and provision of infrastructure. In the slums, which are occupied by 22% of urban inhabitants, less than one-third of the people have access to a public water supply and less than one-fifth to proper sanitation. In general, the environmental conditions in the slums are deplorable and deterioration of the urban environmental sanitation situation is foreseeable (Joshi, 2005).

Cash is desperately needed in the slums to pay for water, food, rent and for goods and services. A study conducted by Southampton University (2005) projected that water collection takes a long time in the slums. Women waited in queues and walked for 30 minutes to almost an hour on certain days and nights just to access water. Women are the prime victims of this situation, carrying water from long distances and in order to keep their 'dignity', waiting for less crowded times to go to the latrine either in the early morning or late evening. No privacy for young girls when bathing or particularly on their menstruation days is problematic, when they cannot occupy the latrine for the required time. This wasted time means that they are late for work or miss working days. Shanti for example, a garment worker, missed one working day so that she could wash her dirty dresses and take a proper bath in Begunlita slum. Children get sick because of the dirty water and unhygienic environment and women are then responsible for taking care of them. This also has an impact on their working hours as well as their income. Further, pollution and the lack of access to clean water are proliferating the cycle of poverty, water-borne diseases, and gender inequities (Khosla and Pearl, 2003).

Government authorities do not serve slums and squatter settlements as they do not have legal tenure or occupancy and are thus not officially recognised. The absence of legal entitlements of the slum residents has resulted in the current practice of bringing in illegal connections for water, electricity and other services. Providing services may constitute a 'de facto recognition of their right of their occupancy' (Feroz Ahmed, 2004). In general, committee members/leaders are the main decision-makers on social issues and access to resources in the slums. For the urban poor, the ability to gain access to any service involves manoeuvring and building relations and networks in complex vertical, political economic structures. For instance, research titled 'Mastanocracy, Insecurity and Gender in Dhaka slum' (Mannan, 2011; Mannan, 2007) highlights the importance of social and particularly political-economic networks which in turn determine access to all kinds of resources and basic amenities from land and housing to water, gas, electricity and jobs. Groups of influential leaders/committee members control the monopoly of basic amenities, charging/extorting ordinary residents huge amounts for access to erratic and inadequate supply of water,⁷ electricity and other basic services (Mannan, 2004; Joshi, et al. 2006; World Bank, 2007).

2.6 Gender and violence

These political alliances do impact on the situation of the slums and the vulnerability of the slum residents, particularly the women, as they are the most vulnerable and easy prey to violence. Mastanocracy as a process intensifies the vulnerability of the urban poor, especially the women (Mannan, 2011; World Bank, 2007). In the Dhaka slums, the influential men (leaders/mastans) from outside the slum try to maintain their dominant position by establishing networks with those up in the existing higher vertical, political structures. Nonetheless, many garment workers living in the slums routinely have to pay 10 percent of their wages in 'protection' (World Bank, 2007). In a Dhaka slum, for example, one teenaged (unmarried) girl who works in a garment factory received the threat of rape if she did not deliver Tk. 5000 to the mastan (Mannan, 2011).

2.7 Missing population: Elderly, disability and gender

The lack of access to adequate water and sanitation places an enormous burden on poor women and in particular, on elderly women living alone who take on the entire responsibility of daily cooking and cleaning themselves. A large part of the vulnerability of women is caused by gender norms, expectations and social and economic roles. Elderly women tend to remain disadvantaged because of their age, health, gender and restricted mobility and also the lack of support from family, society and the state. Poor access to water and sanitation greatly increases their vulnerability. In the slums, poor elderly women have to pay to get some water for drinking or washing. They usually pay young children for a pitcher of water or so. Most of these women have no electricity connection as they cannot afford it. They have dug a hole in their own little hut for a toilet. They use the common bathroom for their daily wash whenever they can manage it.

2.8 Ecological degradation and livelihood strategies

The water pond has played a crucial role in the lives of women. It provided a source of washing, bathing and even drinking water at no extra cost. But now the pond, rivers and other bodies of water are

disappearing. They are either drying up or filled in by illegal occupancies and multi-purpose buildings. Ponds and open lands are important sources of livelihood strategies for the poor. However, with an increasing number of people in the slums, the lack of a natural water body coupled with land being claimed by the housing society and government, pose a great threat to these vulnerable women as they are denied yet another form of institutionalised access.

2.9 Gender and poverty; an old drink in a new bottle!

Despite all the efforts, women and children are the most vulnerable groups amongst the poor in Bangladesh. The magnitude of poverty and vulnerability of women remains shocking. Rounaq Jahan (1995) illustrated this in her book 'The Elusive Agenda: Mainstreaming Women in Development' when she describes the situation of women in the world: "In the last two decades, more women have joined the ranks of the world's poor in both the North and South. The cutbacks in social services as a result of structural adjustment policies, and the increased incidence of crime and violence, have hit poor women the hardest. Women's responsibilities as sole or primary income-earners have increased, their labour force participation rates have grown, but the workplace has not made significant changes to accommodate women's needs, and continues to exploit women as cheap labour. Economic desperation has led to unprecedented female migration and an increased trafficking of women and children worldwide".

Equally, in Bangladesh men and women experience poverty differently. The highest rate of poverty is found amongst poor females in Bangladesh.

2.10 Gender budgeting

According to Amartya Sen: "If our goal is to strengthen economies, alleviate food crises, and eliminate disease and poverty, we must invest in women" (Source: internet). The allocation of the budget for gender related activities is not receiving due attention at the institutional level. However there is flexibility in the gender budget, when required it can be allocated to emerging issues as identified through field level development work. 'Gender is a 'cross cutting' issue that has a 'cross cutting budget' with flexibility to change accordingly' (Joshi, et al., 2005; Wallace, 1998; Plowman, 2000; Zwartveen, 1994; Cleave, 1998).

Dhaka Water Supply and Sanitation Agency (DWASA) and governmental organisations do not have separate budget for gender, and thus they think that "no support was forthcoming on the policy paper in relation to gender. They hope to soon launch a large project with the financial support of the World Bank. Under this project, WASA will improve its 'gender sensitivity' and other pro-poor policies". The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWCA) receives funds directly from the government of Bangladesh. Interestingly, within this total budget there is no separate allocation earmarked for gender related issues. Gender remains a cross-cutting issue in the governmental organisation both theoretically and financially. This makes these organisations less accountable and committed to gender in relation to water and sanitation in Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh recently declared a Gender Responsive Budget (GRB) for 10 ministries for 2010 -2011. This allocation represents 25.96% of the main budget and the government promised to do the same for the other ministries in the near future

(Shomokal, Bengali daily newspaper, 27th August, 2010, p 13).

3. Half of the world, half a chance⁸: Gender at the crossroads

This paper has illustrated some critical issues in relation to gender, water and sanitation in Bangladesh. Nevertheless there are other significant issues beyond gender that also require appropriate attention which are not discussed here. To meet the demands of women's movements and mandates of the United Nations, many special policies and measures have been taken and many international agencies, including the UN, have given gender issues a higher profile when addressing development challenges, particularly in developing countries. According to various data analyses, more girls in Bangladesh are enrolled in school and more women hold political positions in national and local government; but in the crucial areas of women's employment and reproductive health (strongly related to the access of water and sanitation), progress has lagged. Likewise, because of its global relevance, the national government has also identified gender issues as a prime concern in the development planning process.⁹ Progress has been made against the development challenges of the world as set by the MDGs, but much more remains to be done if the world is to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women by 2015. Worse yet, other priorities cannot be measured due to limited or non-existent data. For these areas, we have no idea whether progress is being made and if so, to what extent. To conclude this discussion, some major issues will be highlighted in the context of Bangladesh in relation to gender.

Organisational culture is of critical concern. Deep rooted gender inequalities do exist in the organisations currently being discussed and research points towards three major areas for further consideration: a) organisational culture, b) financial status and c) the power axis within and beyond the organisation. The organisational culture (how values, beliefs and attitudes are played out in practice) is strongly influenced by the given social institutions. Agencies are not alienated from the society; their culture has both external and internal influences that shape roles and culture. Values and culture of a particular society in turn have a great influence on the organisation.

It is not possible to create a gender sensitive organisation until or unless top management is willing to institutionalise gender related issues. Gender is locked in the minds of the agency leaders. The majority of NGOs in Bangladesh suffer from the 'Charismatic Leadership Syndrome' (Mannan, 2002) that is to say that the head of an organisations or the core management team are making the decisions and the voice of women is seldom heard or recognised.

There are no shortcuts to mainstreaming a gender perspective into an organisation's policy and working practice (Levy, 1996). Rather, a dynamic process of questioning "one's own practice and how it promotes the values that are espoused, and then adapting accordingly, is essential" (Wilson and Wallace, 2000). As discussed, gender is always treated as 'special' or a separate issue and thus the general understanding that it is not a responsibility of all but the sole responsibility of the gender. This is one of the major challenges for organisations seeking to mainstream gender.

Gender mainstreaming in development sectors is very much dependent on the role and attitudes of the government and funding agencies. In Bangladesh, the whole concept of gender has been largely shaped and formulated by the donors along with national and international feminist movements. In fact, the

development arena and its many facets, concepts and tools are mostly designed and dominated by outsiders who operate top down and rarely from the bottom up. This situation therefore demands strong commitment and long term sustainable efforts to face the challenges on many fronts and has a long way to go to mainstream gender in sanitation, particularly in institutions. This external influence has caused an enormously debilitating impact on the country's capacity and in terms of the effect it has had of emasculating the intellectual capacity of the country to undertake its own development planning or thinking (Joshi, 2005). Recently in a workshop in Dhaka organised by the BRAC, a leading NGO in Bangladesh, the agriculture minister, Ms Matia Chowdhury (she is an eminent nationalist politician and is renowned for her dedicated work in Bangladesh) asked the NGOs not always to follow the donor prescribed roles for the donor and the implementing agencies, she said, "we [NGOs] don't judge the pros and cons of a project if we get funding without analysing the country's socio-economic and ecological realities and the need of the people" (The Daily Star, 12th August, 2010).

There is a lack of reasoning and power in the institutionalisation of gender. The role of donors and the source of funds have an impact on institutionalising gender. My experience with the Department of Women and Gender Studies (involvement in the project 'Institutionalising the Department of Women's Studies', Dhaka University) drew my attention to the fact that the implementation of gender requires considerable financial backing. Further, government agencies rely heavily on donors for gender sensitisation of the organisation! The founding Chair of the Department expressed her concerns in this light, "it is important to look at the historical growth of women issues through women's studies that could be traced from both experiential and philosophical bases of women's movement and feminist scholarships. As funds required for sustaining women's studies in the western academia became scarce, women's studies courses were wound up or downgraded in terms of significance. This action, coupled with dissipating support from the UN and donor agencies, which had earlier encouraged women's studies in many ways, created crisis for its survival as a discipline of scholarly knowledge" (Chowdhury, 2008). The sanitation sector tends to ignore women even where components focussed on women exist. Greater access to funds and more control over these funds, especially in terms of gender budgeting, would increase the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming in this sector.

Power relation is a critical issue. It is widely discussed that men and women experience power relations differently and unequally (Wallace, 1998; Plowman, 2000). The unequal power relationship between men and women has been identified as a crucial area for change in order to bring about gender equality within organisations (Moser, 1993; Young, 1997). Incorporating gender within an existing plan, programmes or legislation at all levels is not an easy task. More importantly, the person and/or office with a gender focus should have adequate power in the decision making process and not simply be ornamental. Mere policy formulation cannot bring changes to the gender situation in Bangladesh; implementation of the policy requires high political commitment. Political commitment can actually also act as a catalyst in the empowerment of women. Power is a critical issue, for example, there is a 10% female quota in the recruitment policy of the government, although a senior official has confessed that his organisation does not implement this policy as such. The time to explore these links to find new ways of understanding the cycle of power in relation to development work has come (Plowman, 2002; Wallace and Moser, 1993). It is only then that this kind of analysis could help produce appropriate strategies that result in bringing about real changes, changes that benefit both sexes in a positive way.

In Bangladesh 'gender' in the sanitation sector is not sufficiently visible at the grass roots level or in the organisational culture, both of which are still male domination areas. For instance, to ensure the participation of women in the decision making process in a community based slum committee, two female members are included but in practice they are confined to the role of supporting the male members of the committee (Mannan, 2003). In practice, gender with regard to water and sanitation is an isolated agenda in Bangladesh. Mainstreaming gender in sanitation is confined to WID approaches by engaging women in the program priorities only. Nonetheless, the weakness of this approach is that the components focussed on women are often marginal and small compared to the mainstream project and are thus often not very sustainable (Jordans, 1998). The GAD approach, which advocates a long term focus in strengthening the role of women in the decision making process is yet to be reached.

According to Amartya Sen,¹⁰ "Women can be prime movers of constructive social change, locally as well as globally." Wasting half of the human resource and potential cannot bring changes in the development arena. A dream keeps humans alive and living. We are dreaming for a better world where half of the sky will not be dark with violence and the violation of women's rights, that is to say human rights. A global focus that merges the necessary commitment of the international women's movement as a powerful political force with resources and actions will produce results. Similarly, if we dream of a prosperous South Asia, it is also time to utilise our resources and opportunities together to bring about changes in the lives of the deprived section of the population, the majority of whom are still women.

The above discussion reveals a story that is neither new to Bangladesh nor to sectors other than water and sanitation. Achieving gender equity and reducing poverty will require a departure from the current ways of thinking and working within the development process. It can be concluded that there is still a long way to go to reach gender equality in the sanitation sector. Thus, to eliminate gender injustice in general and in terms of sanitation in particular, the patriarchal, organisational culture and mindset need serious rethinking and redefining.

Finally, I think development is a form of politics and thus without political will development cannot be achieved. Gaining political power within a patriarchal system is of critical concern. Without positive political will, change cannot take place in the processes of power relations and decision making. Development can no longer be based on the notion of wellbeing, but must be based on the principles of human rights. This is not only a matter of justice but a matter of rights and good governance. Women, in power and decision making processes are still at the cross roads and must walk a long way to reach their rights to justice, which benefits them and all of mankind.

4. The way forward:

- Each organisation is required a gender focal person with adequate technical expertise.
- This gender specialist should have decision making power both at the policy and advocacy level.
- A regular flow of financial support is essential and gender budgeting is significant.
- Gender training is needed for all levels of staff within the organisation.
- The salary structure should be restructured, especially for front line staff who (90% are female) work as the foundation of the project but are severely underpaid.
- Finally and most importantly, the involvement of women in the decision making process should be encouraged.

Acknowledgements:

I am grateful to Dr. Deepa Joshi and Dr. Ben Fawcett for their support and encouragement in writing research papers and permitting the use of the primary data from the research 'Study on Livelihood-Gender-Sanitation Linkages Relating to the Urban Poor', conducted by the Southampton University in Bangladesh, India and Kenya, supported by the DFID, UK, 2003-2005.

This paper draws upon the following papers/presentations made by the author:

- The heterogeneity of the urban poor', Fouzia Mannan and S. Rashid, December 2004, (unpublished research report);
- Gender and Violence in Dhaka slum', paper presented at the conference on the Future of Asian Feminisms: Confronting Fundamentalisms, Conflict and Neo-liberalism, Kartini Asia Network, Bali, 8-10 November 2008 (in press as a chapter of a book)
- Mainstreaming Gender in Sanitation: An Analytical Study of Selected Organisations in Bangladesh', Working Paper, WGS, no.10, 2010.

Endnotes

¹ Approximately \$1 = Tk. 70.

² A national NGO, DSK has been successfully providing sustainable water and sanitation to slums. A small private enterprise has started delivering water door to door to houses, as the DWASA supply is considered unfit for drinking (Feroz Ahmed, 2004).

³ III World Conference on Women in Nairobi, 1985 brought the slogan 'mainstreaming women and gender'

⁴ DWASA, government agency responsible for water and sanitation services in Dhaka city

⁵ The present Government has by-passed the PRSP as it was a development agenda of the previous government.

⁶ Present Government has by passed the PRSP as it was a development agenda of the previous government

⁷ Slum dwellers pay approximately more than ten times for water access compared to ordinary citizens. This is blamed on billing irregularities, the paying off of linemen and others, and the desperation and willingness of the poor to pay this amount (verbal communication- Fouzia Mannan attending Seminar on Decentralisation on Efficient Urban Management in Bangladesh – December 2004.)

⁸ Mosse, 1993. Oxfam, UK.

⁹ MGDS, PRSP, National Policy for Women in Bangladesh, 1997, Five Year Plan.

¹⁰ Leadership Council chairman, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has spoken in The ICRW Leadership Council. 2008